

Most Child Poisonings Result from Common Household Products

Every 7 minutes, a child arrives at an emergency room due to a suspected poisoning

WASHINGTON, D.C. – About 78,000 children under five years old visited U.S. hospital emergency rooms due to unintentional poisonings in 2003 – about one every seven minutes, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reported today. Most of these poisonings included products commonly found in the home.

The data were released today by CPSC, the National Poison Prevention Week Council, and the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) at a news conference to kick-off National Poison Prevention Week. CPSC Chairman Hal Stratton said that more than 9 of every 10 suspected poison exposures occur at home with readily-available household products. About 30 children die from poisonings each year, down from 450 in the 1960s.

“While our nation has made great progress in reducing poison-related fatalities, we must build on our commitment to protect children from unintentional poisonings,” urged Stratton.

Parents can do their part, he noted, by keeping harmful products and medicines out of children’s reach, storing items in their original containers, and properly using child-resistant packaging.

According to AAPCC, poison centers nationwide received more than one million calls about poison exposures involving children five years and younger in 2003. Among the potentially toxic household products involved with calls to the poison centers were:

- Personal care products, including baby oil and mouthwash containing ethanol;
- Cleaning substances, including drain openers and oven cleaners;
- Over-the-counter pain relievers – including ibuprofen, acetaminophen, and aspirin – and cough and cold medicines;
- Hydrocarbons, such as lamp oil and furniture polish; and
- Adult-strength vitamins and supplements containing iron.

Rose Ann Soloway, chair of the Poison Prevention Week Council, noted that when repackaged at home in non-child-resistant containers, medicines and potentially hazardous household products become even more accessible and dangerous for young children.

“Grandparents who keep their prescription drugs in non-child-resistant pill boxes should be especially aware of this risk,” said Soloway. “Child-resistant packaging doesn’t work if it’s not used properly.”

Many poisoning incidents occur while the products are in use and a parent or caregiver steps away or is distracted for a moment. Children can get hold of a product and swallow it during the short time it takes to answer a phone call or doorbell.

“The alarming number of poison center calls and emergency department visits proves that children act fast, and so do poisons,” said Kathy Wruk, president of AAPCC. “Parents must act fast as well. If your child swallows or handles a potentially dangerous product, immediately call the poison center hotline at 1-800-222-1222. Your call will be answered by experts at your local poison center.”

To get a free packet of poison prevention publications, write to "Poison Prevention Packet," CPSC, Washington, DC 20207, or visit www.poisonprevention.org. For additional information about poison prevention and poison centers, visit www.1-800-222-1222.info.